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ANDREW JACKSON'S HONOR

Bertram Wyatt-Brown

No one in American history and certainly no other president can be more closely identified with the dictates of honor than Andrew Jackson. It was a matter of religious faith, deep as his melancholy wife Rachel's devotion to Presbyterian Christianity. Julian Pitt-Rivers, the leading anthropologist on the subject, recently has remarked that honor itself has elements deemed holy: "a person's honor is said to be sacred, something more precious to him than even his life." Better "death than dishonor!" expressed the grand ideal, whether it concerned a warrior on the battlefield or a woman in her boudoir.¹ "Blessed are the open-handed, for they shall have friends and fame. Blessed are they who wreak vengeance, for they shall have . . . honor and glory all the days of their life and eternal fame in ages to come."² That religious mandate has always competed in western civilization with the more familiar Beatitudes. Certainly as soldier, politician, planter, and husband, Jackson represented these sentiments almost to perfection, particularly, as will later appear, with regard to that lethal instrument of honorable vindication, the *code duello*, and—inseparably linked to it—what is called here protective or instrumental friendships. The principles of honor were the means to create and bind together a privileged group and to classify the ranks of its members for the purposes of establishing order and group cohesion. Under those circumstances, both strong friendships and duels or less ritualized

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¹ *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, ed. John G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers (Cambridge, 1992), 2.

² Quoted in Charles Fenwick Jones, *Honor in German Literature* (1959; rep. New York, 1966), 40.

forms of personal combat were significant in the organizing of leadership in political circles, particularly southern ones.

To identify Jackson as the very model of early American concepts of honor, however, is not meant as an unreserved compliment.³ After all, the code to which he subscribed has always possessed such dark, brutal, even gothic aspects that its failings have been central to epics and dramas throughout the centuries of western civilization. In "The Painter of Dishonour," a play from the Golden Age of Spanish tragedy lately on the London stage, Pedro Calderón's distracted aristocrat, Juan Rocca, who feels compelled to avenge himself against an allegedly unfaithful wife, laments in anguish, "Damn honour and its tyranny! . . . What madness dreamt up laws like these, these shameful rites the world accepts?"⁴ Rocca's own capture in the entanglements of deception did not permit him broader contemplation of the code's defects. But if it had been otherwise, among the distortions that the protagonist might have justly perceived in honor were first, a heartless, overbearing male passion to rule untrammelled, especially over women and menials; second, a repression of self-exposing, seemingly effeminate feelings that could prompt ill-recognized anger and melancholy; and, third, a lust for fame and immortality in men's memory. The latter risked the moral integrity of the seeker of honor itself—an over-reaching that could become self-defeating. All three extremities required a Manichean approach allowing no shades of gray between honor and shame, right and wrong. That sharp differentiation helps to explain why the conferring of honor or a denial of it

³ Jackson, however, should not be accused of any violation of honor when he took an oath of allegiance to the King of Spain early in his commercial career. He only followed the example of other Americans trading or living in Spanish Mississippi because failure to do so would have meant expulsion or arrest. Oath-taking under a Catholic monarchy meant nothing to such as he. The same reaction was prevalent in the post-Civil War era when some ex-Rebels did struggle with their consciences over taking the oath of loyalty to the Union, but most found the obligation a matter of coercion not to mention convenience; oaths under such circumstances scarcely signified. Robert V. Remini explores the matter thoroughly in "Andrew Jackson Takes an Oath of Allegiance to Spain," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 54 (Spring 1995), 2-15.

⁴ Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *The Painter of Dishonour*, trans. and ed. David Johnston and Laurence Boswell (Bath, Eng., 1995), Act III, 106; see also B. W. Ife, "More Than a Show of Respect: Locating the Seat of Honour in Spanish Golden Age Drama," *Times Literary Supplement*, Aug. 11, 1995, 16-17.

becomes a form of dramatization—a staging before a responsive audience.⁵ Jackson's appeal to large aggregations of the male populace lay exactly in his ability to dramatize his manly uprightness and high sense of honor. An historian recently referred to Jackson as “the Caudillo,” a fitting title.⁶ Yet the excesses of his public displays of conviction shed light on his deepest flaws. A discussion of how Jackson united the ethic to his personal identity in a lifetime that seemed almost tragic will close these remarks.

How easy it is today to assail Jackson for his faults and for prejudices about gender, race, and most other opinions that our more enlightened era discountenances. In truth, Jackson's demands during the War of 1812 for fourteen million acres of Creek lands, as he sought to punish the pro-British “Red Sticks,” nudged even authorities in Washington to protest. Having decisively won the battle of Horseshoe Bend in March, 1814, he reprimanded his critics, both white and dark-skinned. “Listen,” he warned ominously, “the creek chiefs and warriors did not respect” our strength. They thought the British would be victorious, for which sentiment “they wanted flogging,” he argued. “We bleed our enemies to give them their senses.” Likewise, in the Seminole War of 1818 his actions were a study in flagrant disobedience, gross inequity, and premeditated ruthlessness. The late historian John William Ward noted, “He swept through Florida, crushed the Indians, executed the Englishmen, Arbuthnot and Ambrister, and . . . violated nearly every standard of justice.” He claimed powerlessness only when, as President, he obligingly surrendered federal authority to the southern doctrine of states' rights in the handling of Indian relations.⁷

Jackson's approach to free speech and assembly was equally mean-spirited. After the abolitionists' great national publicity drive in 1835, President Jackson, that alleged champion of liberty, showed his Constitutional scruples by recommending that Congress prohibit by law the delivery of antislavery materials through the United States

⁵ See David Chaney, “The Spectacle of Honour: The Changing Dramatization of Status,” *Theory Culture & Society*, 12 (Aug. 1995), 147-67.

⁶ Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties 1790s-1840s* (New York, 1983), 18.

⁷ Quoted in Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (New York, 1996), 120, 124-25.

mails.⁸ The two examples scarcely exhaust the list of public acts that seem reprehensible now. Like other men of honor, Jackson was also capable of decisions that even contemporaries would not have regarded as honorable. So long as they were not visibly committed by his dramatized or public self but took place behind the scenes (such as plotting to bring down a rival like Calhoun without showing his hand), he lost in his own time no appearance of honor—and only appearance in a sense mattered.⁹ In spite of these problems, the Hero of New Orleans possessed a charismatic greatness and complexity of character truly astonishing. Moreover, his activities early in his career in Nashville can serve to illustrate the nature of politics and patronage and their connection with dueling not only on the frontier but in the South and the nation at that time. In other words, Jackson's sense of honor can be treated as a sort of metaphor signifying a particular southern distinctiveness. Above all, Jackson was as deeply committed to white southern customs, convictions, and prejudices as any observer could imagine.

Before pursuing the character of this fascinating leader further, a few remarks are in order on how historians have been treating the concept of honor. Fifteen years ago, the subject catalog in libraries contained almost no entries on honor save those related to Shakespearean and German literary history.¹⁰ Historians, with the exception of Dickson Bruce and a few others, treated the ethic of honor as no more than a mischievous hypocrisy—if they mentioned it at all.¹¹ It was not examined as a complicated impulse, one that involved the interaction of the claimant and the public arena in which badges of gentility were denied or conferred. As early as 1966 the anthropologist J. G. Peristiany, however, already had set a new approach when he defined the process in

⁸ Louis Filler, *The Crusade against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York, 1960), 98; Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York, 1970), 50-51; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Abolitionists' Postal Campaign of 1835," *Journal of Negro History*, 50 (Oct. 1965), 227-38.

⁹ See Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), 339-40.

¹⁰ Jones, *Honor in German Literature*; Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton, 1960); Edwin Honig, *Calderón and the Seizures of Honor* (Cambridge, 1972).

¹¹ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin, TX, 1979).

this way: "Honour felt becomes Honour claimed and Honour claimed becomes Honour paid."¹² To complete the psychological circle, though, one should add: honor paid becomes honor felt within as part of one's own personality. In contrast, to lose one's honor in closely-knit, face-to-face communities, as Norbert Elias observed many years ago, was to blast "a constitutive element of . . . personal identity."¹³

The slow recognition of honor in American history is puzzling because fellow social scientists—sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists—long have recognized and explored the relevance of the ethic in the contemporary world, including the American South.¹⁴ Nonetheless, beginning in the 1980s, fresh ideas started to appear, especially in medieval, early modern, and modern European and Canadian history. A special concentration has developed on the custom of dueling abroad.¹⁵ In America, too, progress has lately become

¹² "Introduction," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago, 1966), 22.

¹³ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1969; rep., New York, 1983), 94.

¹⁴ A sample of social science studies of honor includes Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (New York, 1996); Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame*; J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (New York, 1964); David Gilmore, *Aggression and Community: Paradoxes of Andalusian Culture* (New Haven, 1987); Ruth Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community* (New Brunswick, 1983); Ruth Horowitz and Gary Schwartz, "Honor, Normative Ambiguity and Gang Violence," *American Sociological Review*, 39 (Apr. 1974), 238-51; Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 7 (New York, 1968), 503-10; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex* (Cambridge, 1977); Michael Emmison, "Victors and Vanquished," *Language and Communications*, 7 (1987), 93-110; Phil Manning, "Ritual Talk," *Sociology*, 23 (Aug. 1989), 365-85; Chaney, "Spectacle of Honour," 147-67. Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago, 1994), surveys the field. He argues (wrongly however) that honor does not necessarily involve hierarchical arrangements. Even in the most democratic or classless societies like the Bedouins, hierarchical distinctions of all sorts separate men and women, outsiders and kin, and differing ascriptions, bloodlines, and skills within the group. See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley, 1986), 86-87. The author points out that in Bedouin society honor or *aSl* means "ancestry/origin/nobility," terms suggesting hierarchy. Moreover, Stewart claims I offer no definition of honor in *Southern Honor*; the first 114 pages do exactly that and are based on the same Pitt-Rivers and Peristiany definitions upon which Stewart relies. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in The Old South* (New York, 1982).

¹⁵ James Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour: Duelling in Ireland 1570-1860*

evident, particularly the investigations of Edward L. Ayers, Steven M. Stowe, and Kenneth S. Greenberg on southern aspects of honor. The subject of dueling remains under-examined in this country.¹⁶ Also, surprisingly little so far has appeared on northern honor and concepts of gentility in general apart from Joanne Freeman's recent work.¹⁷ In addition, historians of the colonial and constitutional periods have had almost nothing to say on the subject. In fact, colonial

(Cork, 1995); Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York, 1993); Kevin McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany* (Princeton, 1994); Kristen Brooke Neuschel, *Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, 1989); David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (New York, 1984); Ellery Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Princeton, 1986); Cecilia Morgan, "'In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour': Duelling in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 76 (Dec. 1995), 529-62; V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1988); Antony E. Simpson, "'Dandelions on the Field of Honor: Dueling, the Middle Classes, and the Law in Nineteenth-Century England,'" *Criminal Justice History*, 9 (1988), 99-155; Stephen Wilson, "'Infanticide, Child Abandonment and Female Honour in Nineteenth Century Corsica,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (Oct. 1988), 762-83; François Billaçois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France* (New Haven, 1990); Lauro Martines, ed., *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities* (Berkeley, 1972); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975); Mervyn James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society* (Oxford, 1986); E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, 1994); Pieter Spierenburg, "'Faces of Violence: Homicide Trends and Cultural Meanings: Amsterdam, 1431-1816,'" *Journal of Social History*, 2 (Summer 1994), 701-16. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) explains the ethic of honor as an underpinning of slave societies.

¹⁶ Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (New York, 1984); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore, 1987); Steven M. Stowe, "'The 'Touchiness' of the Gentleman Planter: The Sense of Esteem and Continuity in the Antebellum South,'" *Psychohistory Review*, 8 (Winter 1979), 6-17; Elliot J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,'" *American Historical Review*, 90 (Feb. 1985), 18-43; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore, 1985); and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton, 1996).

¹⁷ See Joanne B. Freeman, "'Aristocratic Murder and Democratic Fury: Honor and Politics in Early National New England,'" paper presented at the 17th annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, Nashville, Tennessee, July 20, 1996, "'Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Hamilton-Burr Duel,'" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53 (Apr. 1996), 289-318, and a longer forthcoming study, *Affairs of Honor*. See also Evarts B. Greene, "'The Code of Honor in Colonial and Revolutionary Times, With Special Reference to New England,'" *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 26 (Boston, 1927), 367-88.

and backcountry historians in general stoutly reject David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed*, a work that proposes the kind of cultural interpretation that is offered here.¹⁸

Despite these missing elements, the outpouring of new studies both in the United States and abroad has led naturally to a reconsideration of points that appeared in 1982 in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. The most significant of these was the proposition that honor had been operative constantly throughout American and European history and that it had given way steadily to religious, institutional and commercial forces. Instead, it was a process, yet powerful enough in slaveholding, southern hearts to generate the secession crisis and the cause of Confederate chivalry against Yankee imperialism (as southerners deemed their struggle). To some degree, this initial proposition was too much influenced by European historians' notion of *la longue durée*. Instead, James Kelly on Ireland, Kevin McAleer on Germany, and Robert Nye on France, as well as Bruce Baird in a recent paper on early southern dueling, have convinced me that the custom of ritualized personal combat in the upper classes of western societies enjoyed a broken, not steady history.¹⁹ Like religion with its revivals and declensions, honor or at least its most mortal ritual seems to have had everywhere and at the same time a more discontinuous past of ups and downs than I once assumed.²⁰

The duel's origins, of course, are traceable to the ordeal of combat under supposedly divine auspices in the Middle Ages, but challenge with pistol or sword was a rare event in seventeenth or even early eighteenth-century Virginia. Why, then, did it emerge about

¹⁸ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989); see also for instance, Altina Waller, "The Power of Culture," *Appalachian Journal*, 19 (Winter 1991), 176-81; Rodger Cunningham, "Second and Third Thoughts on *Albion's Seed*," *ibid.*, 173-76; David Hackett Fischer, "Albion and the Critics: Further Evidence and Reflection," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 48 (Apr. 1991), 260-308.

¹⁹ Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*; Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*; McAleer, *Dueling: Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany*; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Bruce C. Baird, "Dueling and the Origins of the Old South," paper presented at the 17th annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, July 20, 1996, a prospectus, as it were, of a more thorough work in progress on this topic.

²⁰ Such a reversal of opinion would gratify that notable "discontinuarian," C. Vann Woodward.

the time of the American Revolution, which has lately been celebrated for its radical tendencies more than its reaffirmations of medieval practices? No completely satisfactory answer has yet appeared, but the question brings us back to Andrew Jackson's honor. After all, he was the only American president to have fought duels and, on one notable occasion, to have killed his adversary. Jackson's fight against Charles Henry Dickinson should be seen from two perspectives—the light it sheds on the political culture of the early republic and second, the duel's sources in Jackson's own personal history, an angle that reveals how his tragic past and reaction to it led him to the dueling ground. Such a mingling of political and community life with the purely psychological and biographical has become more acceptable in recent years. A dissatisfaction with the limitations of old-fashioned institutional approaches to politics and an appreciation of how personal, ethnic, gender, and racial factors affect the political realm happily has developed.

To set the stage for the first of the two considerations— Jackson's political expression of honor—an account of his most famous duel must be offered. The trouble between the Tennessee leader and Charles Dickinson arose from a dispute over a horse-race. Racing was more than an entertainment in that society: it offered the wealthy a chance to display their power.²¹ Andrew Jackson took great pride in his fine stable of Arabians. His five-year old Truxton was renowned even beyond the state borders.²² Against Truxton, Captain Joseph Ervin posted his champion, Ploughboy. \$2000 made up the stakes, a large sum for the early nineteenth century. On the day before the race, Ploughboy went lame and had to be scratched. As a result,

²¹ On southern horse-racing, see Timothy H. Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York, 1980), 148-63. The classic essay on the utility of gaming is Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 412-56, and the classic study is Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, 1955). On the origins of the dispute and a good narrative of the sequence leading toward the duel, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, ed. Sam B. Smith *et al.*, (5 vols., Knoxville, 1980-96), II 77-78.

²² See Memorandum of Agreement with John Verell for the Purchase of Truxton, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Andrew Jackson*, II, 57-58.

Ervin had to forfeit \$800 in notes that Jackson had the right to approve or reject.²³

Rumors circulated that the general was dissatisfied with the way Ervin and his son-in-law Charles Dickinson were handling the debt. The principals in the dispute had their cliques of hangers-on, militia cronies, and personal aides. One of them was Thomas Swann, a young lawyer from Powhatan County, Virginia, who served the Ervin-Dickinson leaders as a general factotum, gathering news, running errands, and canvassing during elections. Jackson had no respect for him. However, on one occasion during the growing rounds of charges and innuendoes, the general called Swann's patron, Charles Dickinson, a "base poltroon and cowardly tale-bearer who will always act in the background."²⁴ Young lawyer Swann took the remarks as an affront to himself as well as to his leader—as well Swann might.

At their next encounter in a tavern, Jackson knocked Swann down with a cane. Predictably, the youthful Swann demanded a duel.²⁵ Jackson, however, refused. The challenger, he concluded, was no gentleman. Conforming to the rules of pistol etiquette, Jackson "would not degrade himself by accepting his challenge."²⁶ Jackson did aver, though, that if Swann could find a friend of appropriate moral rank, he would, as he put it, pledge "my word and my honor"

²³ John Hutchings to ed., *Impartial Review*, Feb. 10, 1806, in *Correspondence of Jackson*, ed. John Spencer Bassett (6 vols., Washington, DC, 1926), I, 127-28; Charles S. Carson to Jackson, Feb. 10, 1806, *ibid.* 135; Announcement of Race between Truxton and Ploughboy, Mar. 1, 1806, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 90 (a second race after Ploughboy's recovery).

²⁴ Jackson to Swann, Jan. 7, 1806, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 124.

²⁵ John Coffee, statement, Feb. 5, 1806, in *ibid.*, 130; Thomas Swann to Jackson, Jan. 3, 1806, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 78; also, Thomas Swann to Jackson, Jan. 12, 1806, *ibid.*, 82.

²⁶ Coffee, statement, Feb. 5, 1806, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 130. Among other failings that discredited "this valiant squire" Swann, Jackson sarcastically noted, had once in a duel fired prior to the word and claimed the violation an accident. Nathaniel McNairy proposed that a "court of honor" should decide whether his friend Swann was a gentleman, but Coffee, as Jackson's spokesman, observed, "I thought that gentleman's honor and feelings was too delicate, to arbitrate, that under the existing circumstances" the general had made sufficient answer (p. 131). On Jackson's opinion of Swann, see statement in *Impartial Review*, Mar. 1, 1806, *ibid.*, 137.

to “meet him on any gentlemanly ground.”²⁷ Duels, of course, were only fought between gentlemen of proximate age and reputation.

The *contretemps* grew more complicated. Other members of the Nashville elite plunged themselves into the spreading rivulet of male intrigue. Two of them—Jackson’s best friend General John Coffee and Nathaniel McNairy, a Dickinson supporter—duelled over their superiors’ dispute.²⁸ McNairy fired prematurely and shot Coffee through the fleshy part of the leg. After exchanges of some hot words, the young men ended their showdown, both claiming “satisfaction” that their courage and self-esteem remained untarnished. In Irish duels, the leg was known to be the most popular part of the male anatomy.²⁹

Meantime, Charles Dickinson felt obliged to offer himself as replacement for the rejected Swann. Dickinson himself already had insulted Jackson. Early in the dispute, Dickinson had questioned in public Rachel Jackson’s honor, tarnished by a messy marital history. Jackson heard about the insult. Biographer James Parton claimed that Jackson “kept pistols in perfect condition for thirty-seven years” to use whenever someone “dared breathe her name except in honor.” Jackson demanded explanation from the offender who at once apologized and attributed his lapse of discretion to overdrinking. Jackson accepted the excuse, but he never forgot a slight. As he later declared, if Dickinson wished “to blow the coal, I am ready to light it to a blaze that it may be consumed at once, and finally extinguished.”³⁰ The climax came when Dickinson posted a card in the local paper saying, among other things, “I declare” Jackson “‘a poltroon and a coward’, a man who, by frivolous and evasive pretexts, avoided giving the satisfaction, which was due to a gentleman whom he had injured.”³¹ Jackson’s close friends advised that he had little choice. In the appropriate language of the *code duello*, the general replied to Dickinson, “Insults may be given by men,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131-32.

²⁸ See John Brahan to John Overton, Mar. 8, 1806, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 90-91.

²⁹ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York, 1977), 138-39; Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*.

³⁰ Parton quoted in Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Anecdotes* (New York, 1996), 68; Jackson to Thomas Swann, Jan. 7, 1806, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 124.

³¹ Dickinson Card, *Impartial Review*, May 24, 1806, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 142-43.

and of such a kind that they must be noticed and treated with the respect due a gentleman, altho (as in the present instance) you do not merit it. You have, to disturb my quiet, industriously excited Tho's Swann to quarrel with me'' with the result that the ''peace and harmony of society'' have been outrageously disturbed. Jackson accepted the challenge.³²

As Robert Remini describes it in his prize winning biography, the fateful event took place on May 30, 1806, at a hostelry in Logan County, Kentucky. Dickinson was already well known as a superb marksman, but Jackson was no sharpshooter. He intended to hold fire, a dangerous but strategic decision. At the signal, at once Dickinson aimed and fired. A puff of dust was visible as the shot struck Jackson's bulky coat. The general swayed only a little. In utter amazement, Dickinson staggered back from his position, crying out ''Great God! Have I missed him?'' ''Back to the MARK, Sir,'' Jackson's second, Major John Overton, commanded as he pulled out his own pistol menacingly. By the code, Overton had every right to kill Dickinson on the spot for violating the rules. Dickinson obeyed. Meanwhile Jackson aimed his gun carefully and slowly. He pulled the trigger. Click—that was all that could be heard. The hammer had stopped, half-cocked.³³ A conference took place, and the seconds apparently agreed that a mechanical failure should not deny Jackson the choice to proceed.³⁴ As Dickinson waited for what must have seemed an eternity, Jackson coolly recocked the pistol, drew it down and fired.

This time, Dickinson was struck in the upper part of his stomach, and the ball pierced through his back, leaving an enormous hole. Within hours, he was dead. ''My God! General Jackson, are you hit?'' exclaimed Major Overton. ''Oh! I believe that he has pinked me a little,'' the hero replied. ''Let's look at it. But say nothing about

³² Jackson to Dickinson, May 23, 1806, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 143-44.

³³ For information on the duel and the prior exchanges, see *ibid.* 122-49; Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 142; James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; New York, 1861), I, 297-300.

³⁴ Quoted in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 145n. The matter of Jackson's right to fire again is in some dispute. Parton does not record a conference of seconds, but Bassett reported that according to tradition, the seconds conferred before Jackson could take aim again, and that, according to the rules of the code, seems a most likely event. Surely the seconds would have done so.

it there,” nodding toward his prostrate victim whom Jackson intended never to learn whether he had struck him.³⁵ The ball had broken two ribs and rested in the chest cavity within millimeters of Jackson’s heart so that it could never be safely removed.³⁶

Dickinson’s friends were dismayed. They complained that Jackson had deliberately worn a coat which was so ill-fitting that the marksman aimed amiss. But officially they had no grounds for protest: the time to register the matter was before, not after the event. Dickinson should have aimed at his head not heart. Even so, if the general was to be believed, the outcome would still have been the same. Jackson once muttered in his all-consuming, unholy hatred, “I should have hit him if he had shot me through the brain.”³⁷ Dickinson’s father-in-law, Captain Ervin, questioned Jackson’s right to shoot after the first fire had failed. He admitted that the seconds had decided the issue on the field, but, Ervin argued, “A snap not to be considered as a fire was never committed to writing” among the stipulations drawn up by the parties beforehand. Even Ervin had acknowledged Jackson had not cheated. His cold-blooded decision to shoot a defenseless opponent certainly looked dishonorable in retrospect. Given the risk Jackson had already taken in waiting to fire because of the inequality in their marksmanship, who would have done otherwise if placed in his boots? Despite the complaints, all that Dickinson’s friends could do was prepare a memorial for publication lamenting the loss. When word spread that Jackson was eager to scrutinize the document very closely, some twenty-five of the signers returned to have themselves removed from the page. These erstwhile friends of Dickinson agreed with Sir John Falstaff about the proportion of discretion that valor commands.³⁸

³⁵ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, I, 300. Jackson told Parton, that since “Dickinson considered himself the best shot in the world, and was certain of killing him at the first fire, *he did not want him to have the gratification even of knowing that he had touched him.*” *ibid.*, 301.

³⁶ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, I, 304-05.

³⁷ Quoted *ibid.*, 297.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 303-04; Jackson to Thomas Gassaway Watkins, June 15, 1806, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 102-03, Jackson to Thomas Eastin, circa. June, 1806, *ibid.*, 106-07; Randall McGavock, Aug. 23, 1806, *ibid.*, 107-08 and 109n.

From the perspective of early American political culture, the drama and the issue were not as pointless and trivial as they might seem. Duels separated the respectability of gentlemen from the rest of society. They engaged the larger public in a personal affair. By that means judgments could be made about the manliness and qualities of leadership that the antagonists exhibited. Seldom truly private in a climate of a democratic public, duels involved sometimes scores of observers and intriguers, most of whom belonged to a tight little circle of males, usually politicians. For instance, the Congressional duel between Jonathan Cilley of Maine and William J. Graves of Kentucky in 1838 drew 34 people into the controversy. At least a dozen rumor-mongers elbowed and poked themselves into the Jackson-Dickinson affair, in addition to which there were the principals, seconds, physicians, and others at the duel itself.

By ritualizing violence in a punctilious grammar of honor, as it were, duels were supposed to prevent potential chaos. That scourge of public and familial order, the blood feud, could be avoided under the problematic idea that a man's sullied reputation would thereby be restored. As often happened, the Dickinson affair did not give the satisfaction sought but for a few months isolated Jackson, just as Aaron Burr's killing of Alexander Hamilton had damaged the vice president's career. According to biographer James Parton, after consulting some Nashville oldtimers, "at no time between the years 1806 and 1812 could General Jackson have been elected to any office in Tennessee that required a majority of voters of the whole State." Remini agrees that the duel made him "virtually a social outcast in western Tennessee."³⁹ Jackson's later military successes erased much of the opprobrium, but certainly in national politics the incident at the Kentucky tavern still reverberated during the 1828 campaign in northern sectors. President Adams's supporters disseminated a pamphlet that counted fourteen separate incidents when Jackson had "killed, slashed, and clawed various American citizens."⁴⁰ Northeasterners considered his dueling the most serious and barbaric of these offenses. Despite a temporary loss of local popularity and even opprobrium in

³⁹ Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, I, 305. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 143; Freeman, "Duelling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Hamilton-Burr Duel," 289-318.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Boller, *Presidential Anecdotes*, 67.

larger circles, southern duelists had their own rationale for their behavior. Above all, like Jackson, they were expressing their firm ties of loyalty in the patron-client relationships that political factions then required.

The last point needs elaboration since the relationship of patron and client has been regrettably under-studied in this country, in contrast to the work done abroad.⁴¹ The characteristics of the transaction are these: a non-contractual arrangement whereby two individuals of unequal power—"lop-sided friendship" as Julian Pitt-Rivers calls it—agree on the basis of mutual interest and cordiality to do favors for each other.⁴² "Most clients," writes an historical expert on the topic, "rendered faithful service to their patrons and most patrons reciprocated by looking after the clients' interests."⁴³ The lesser party gained particular rewards, for instance an access through the patron to someone higher up the ladder of power. Friendships between gentlemen of the same status might be similarly instrumental, but the parties recognized each other as equals rather than as leader and subordinate.

In these exercises, out of fear of losing respect, the friend or client must not, however, become an obvious sycophant. Jackson felt uncom-

⁴¹ On patron-client relations, see Eric R. Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies," in *The Anthropology of Complex Societies*, ed. Michael Banton (New York, 1966), 1-22; Sharon Kettering, "The Historical Development of Political Clientelism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18 (Winter 1988), 419-47; Saul N. Eisenstadt and Louis Roniger, "Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchanges," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (Jan. 1980), 42-77; Carl H. Landé, "The Dyad Basis of Clientelism," in *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, ed. Steffen W. Schmidt et al. (Berkeley, 1977); Kenneth Brown, "Changing Forms of Patronage in a Moroccan City," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, ed. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (London, 1977), 309-27; René Lemarchand and Keith Legg, "Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis," *Comparative Politics*, 4 (Jan. 1972), 68-90; René Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building," *American Political Science Review*, 66 (Mar. 1972), 68-90; Luigi Graziano, "Patron-Client Relationships in Southern Italy," *European Journal of Political Research*, 1 (Apr. 1973), 3-34; Luigi Graziano, "A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelistic Behavior," *European Journal of Political Research*, 4 (June 1976), 149-74; Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth Century France* (New York, 1986).

⁴² Julian A. Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (New York, 1954), 140.

⁴³ J. Russell Major, the early modern French scholar, is quoted in Neuschel, *Word of Honor*, 7.

fortable in seeking offices and once while in Washington refused, he claimed, to act the "courteor [sic]." Yet he was hoping for appointment under President Thomas Jefferson for the post of Governor of Louisiana in 1804 just after the acquisition of the territory. "Let me declare to you that before I would violate my own ideas of propriety," he informed his friend Congressman George W. Campbell, "I would yield up any office in the government was I in possession of the most honourable and lucrative." He added in the same paragraph how much he appreciated the "friendly attention of my friends" in his quest for appointment and commended Campbell's growing popularity that was based "on your own merit."⁴⁴ These sentiments were designed to show that he could appreciate the delicacy of friendly alliance as well as any officeseeker. In similar vein when a Presidential candidate in 1824, he explained to a northern friend, "I have seen & enjoyed much of the honor . . . and regard of my country . . . without any covert solicitation on my part; . . . in nothing in which I have been engaged did I ever look to myself."⁴⁵ He probably believed every Cincinnati word, but the remarks were typical and, by convention, designed to assert independence and disdain self-seeking.

The systems of patronage and instrumental or protective friendships, as they might be called, had defects. Any arrangement based upon intense expressions of mutual affection, between equals or unequals, is bound to be brittle because both parties demand complete loyalty, complete trustworthiness. When ambitions diverge or the status and power of the parties substantially change, frustration, jealousy, hurt feelings quickly arise, as sociologist Eric Wolf points out.⁴⁶ Another difficulty in friendly and patron-client structures, is a lack of differentiation between public policy and private interest. A polite fiction of assistance heartily given masked the obligatory character of such exchanges of services. Honor demanded a show of manly autonomy. Any brisk trading of offices, emoluments, privileges, and special treatment for the performance of useful favors smacked of demeaning commercialism, greed,

⁴⁴ Jackson to George W. Campbell, Apr. 28, 1804, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 90-91.

⁴⁵ Andrew Jackson to Major Samuel Swartwout, Mar. 4, 1824, in "Some Letters of Andrew Jackson," ed. Henry F. DePuy, *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 31 (Apr. 1921), 76.

⁴⁶ Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations," 11-13.

and corruption. "Office," Jackson charged in an address at the beginning of his presidency, "is considered as a species of property."⁴⁷ Indeed, factional opponents or losers in the grab for advantages almost invariably claimed the winners to have betrayed the public good, neglected principle, and exposed their villainy and lust for power before the world. In response, victors in such arrangements quite naturally denounced their rivals as scoundrels while claiming to be pure of heart, self-sacrificing and noble in word and deed. The Manichean approach in these usages of honor almost assured a volatile political landscape. The public air in the early years of national history was constantly filled with cries of treachery and rascality on the one hand and soothing voices of loyal commitment to statesmen of lofty mien on the other. In reference to early American political structure, Joanne Freeman concludes, "Politicians considered their own fighting unit a band of friends, all men of honor who promoted the common good." In an age when partisanship was thought an enemy of sound government, their adversaries labeled them as grasping self-seekers.⁴⁸ Members of neither one side nor the other perceived themselves in the light they attributed to their enemies. The certainties of their adversaries' evil and their own good were so embedded in their mode of thinking that the Christian admonition about the mote and beam very much applied.

As political scientists and sociologists have examined patronage in worldwide context, the patron, for his part, obtains the fidelity and the legwork that the junior can provide and also the prestige of having a stable of young followers with promise and increasing standing. Both parties, in fact, benefit from public notice of their association. Hospitality, for which the Old South was famous, was a way to advertise a renewal of old cordialities or announce new ones. To use Jackson's own words for exalting that male bond, "the sacred hand of friendship" between gentlemen, could be advertised by means of dances, banquets, hunts, and barbecues. Often enough, such entertainments, as well as the choice of speakers and toast-givers to grace a formal occasion, could also flaunt the power of one patron's faction against that of another. Planter and politician James Henry Hammond of South Carolina was

⁴⁷ Jackson quoted in Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1845* (New York, 1991), 302.

⁴⁸ Freeman, "Dueling as Politics," 306.

very conscious of why staging elaborate diversions was significant. With reference to a rival leader, he boasted in his diary, "Manning could not conceal it. He built his fine house in Clarendon to beat me," but, Hammond fumed, "I beat them *in their own line*—furniture, balls and dinner parties."⁴⁹ Hammond was unusually cynical about the primacy of palpable gains over ties of cordiality. Hope of reciprocated advantage *and* desire for friendship mattered in both relations between equal partners and between patrons and clients.⁵⁰

The world in which these practices flourished throughout the slave states differed from the gradually changing moral climate of the northern states, especially in the era of the Second Great Awakening and the economic upsurge of the 1820s and 1830s. In the new language of the middle class, Yankees who deplored violence, formal or not, valued reliability, calculation, restraint, and deferred gratification, according to legal historian Antony Simpson.

Increasingly, northerners, driven by the so-called "Market Revolution" made contracts, obtained loans, and settled debts by institutional means (chiefly local banks) rather than by personal arrangements with a local slaveholder of means. As late as the 1850s in the South, the yeomanry often sought help, in cash or kind, from wealthy landowners with an unspoken understanding about who should receive the farmer's vote when the squire's name appeared on the ballot.⁵¹

To a large extent, Jackson's 1828 presidential campaign conformed to these differences in political values and practices because they were

⁴⁹ Hammond quoted, Dec. 9, 1846, entry in *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, A Southern Slaveholder*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York, 1988), 174; Andrew Jackson to Thomas Hart Benton, Aug. 4, 1813, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 418; Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Stranger, the Guest, and the Hostile Host: Introduction to the Study of the Laws of Hospitality," in *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology: Mediterranean Rural Communities and Social Change*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Paris, 1967), 13-30.

⁵⁰ Sharon Kettering, "Patronage, Language, and Political Culture: Patronage in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies*, 17 (Fall 1992), 839-62, offers a very thorough examination of the complications of courtesies and ideals on one side and actual power realities on the other that were conveyed through action and language in patron-client relations.

⁵¹ See, for instance, J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT, 1985), 97-100; and Ralph Mann, "Mountains, Land, and Kin Networks: Burkes Garden, Virginia, in the 1840s and 1850s," *Journal of Southern History*, 58 (Aug. 1992), 411-34.

deeply embedded in sectional mores. The historian J. Mills Thornton observes that “Alabamians were preaching the substance of the Jacksonian faith long before Jackson had become its symbol.”⁵² The litany of that faith, as Thornton explains, included the fiercest possible defense of slavery as a prerequisite for white liberty, states’ rights, individual autonomy, low taxes, and small government—all of which Jacksonians, especially southern ones, believed sustained their collective honor and individual liberty. Nor were Alabamians alone in giving their Tennessee neighbor an enormous majority in 1828. Although highly popular throughout the nation, Jackson fell short of a majority in the northern states’ electoral count (49 per cent) whereas from the South’s Electoral College representation he garnered 92 per cent.⁵³ To be sure, Jackson had no monopoly on the rules governing the sectional ethic, but he epitomized it to perfection.

Armed with convictions that their political spokesmen shared—whether Democrat, National Republican or States’ Rights Whig—southern friends, patrons, clients, and gentlemen with a keen sense of military bearing cherished those manly virtues that required frequent affirmation before the public. They sought to display courage, coolness under fire, and unreflective, quick reactions to changes in the social temperature or to personal and collective danger.⁵⁴ Given these conditions of immediacy in handling personal confrontations, political duels readily emerged from minor disagreements and rebuffs. In effect they were proclamations of a factional leader’s weight in the community, something that had to be confirmed in the public eye. The credentials and potentialities of the client really mattered. Patrons like General Jackson did not feel obliged to move any numbskull ahead. For instance, John C. Calhoun adopted as his client the brilliant but unconnected George McDuffie, once an apprentice clerk in the store of Calhoun’s father. Over the years the senior promoted his young friend

⁵² J. Mill Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 20.

⁵³ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and The Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York, 1984), 118, 123; Robert V. Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963), 156-57; William B. Lewis to John Coffee, July 27 1828, John Coffee Papers (Tennessee State Archives, Nashville). The figures on the 1828 election are presented in the brilliant but regrettably unpublished essay of Leonard L. Richards, “The Question of Slaveholder Domination,” p. 26.

⁵⁴ Simpson, “Dandelions on the Field of Honor,” 107.

as opportunities arose. In gratitude for past favors and future expectations McDuffie fought a duel with a Calhoun adversary, Colonel William Cumming. For the sake of Calhoun's honor as well as his own, McDuffie received a ball that nearly struck his spine, and he suffered much thereafter from the wound.⁵⁵ His survival, though, assured him of his patron's undying fidelity. Jackson, too, had in his camp such highly intelligent but not particularly wellborn professionals in politics as John Overton, William B. Lewis, John Coffee, and John H. Eaton, all of whom aided his career whilst he assisted theirs.

Thus, politics was a major avenue for the poor but educated young man to get ahead—that is, *if* he could qualify as an active member of the male elite. At a time when political parties were at best unsteady collections of factions led by local worthies one had to rely less on institutional allegiances than on patrons, friends and kinspeople for support. Like a convenient marriage into money, a political office in those times opened doors to power and riches when opportunities were so limited for those just aspiring to enter the ranks of the upper class. In fact, for some, there was almost glee in learning of a fatal duel. A young unemployed South Carolinian, for instance, planned a quick trip to the state capital, as he wrote a friend, because of “the great vacancy there is in consequence of the death of Burnside who was killed in his unfortunate duel with Crawford. Likewise for twenty-seven-year-old Dickinson the chance to fight and perhaps kill the leader of a rival political faction as renowned as the middle-aged General Jackson indicated Dickinson's own rising status. Ironically Jackson himself, when a young lawyer, challenged Waightsill Avery, an older attorney, who had refused to take him on as an apprentice and had mocked his courtroom blunders. Luckily the subsequent volley of shots struck neither human target.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, Nationalist, 1782-1828* (Indianapolis, 1944), 49-50, 213, 252, 254-55. “Never have my feelings undergone so great a change [to happiness] in so short a time,” Calhoun exulted upon learning of his protégé's survival (p. 255). See also Michael O'Brien, *A Character of Hugh Legare* (Knoxville, 1985), 41-42; William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York, 1965), 145-46.

⁵⁶ Jackson to Waightsill Avery, Aug. 12, 1788, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Jackson* I, 12; Wesley Hoby to James Henry Hammond, Mar. 28, 1828, James Henry Hammond Manuscript (South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia); Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 29, 28-39.

Dickinson's role had another dimension. In addition to the natural anxieties of the young about manhood, employment, and place in the community, the potential duelist often belonged to the overcrowded profession of the law. Dickinson and his opponent were both members of the Nashville bar. There simply were not enough cases to go around. Hence the desperate hunger for political positions—attorney-general, bailiff, judge, congressman, or whatever. One estimate suggests that ninety per cent of southern duels were fought by lawyers, an exaggeration perhaps, but not by much.⁵⁷ Lawyers became involved in the political arena as local editors, officeseekers, or commissioned officers in the militia—sometimes taking on all three occupations. The title of “Major,” “Colonel,” or best of all, “General” did wonders for reputation in that very hierarchical society. Unlike modern America the distance between the warrior culture of the armed services and civilian life was not very pronounced in Jackson's day. Valor at arms that nowadays attracts little cachet then was treated with solemn respect, most especially in the South. “We have here Colonel Tom and Colonel Dick and Major Billy” wrote architect Benjamin LaTrobe when traveling in the South. “You are right in wishing to get rid of the infernal and eternal title of *Captain*,” confided an Alabama planter to his brother. “Col[onel] is the prettiest title belonging to the military profession in my opinion.” His conviction was scarcely unique in a region where, a contemporary estimated, about one in every three members of the possessing class sported a militia rank of some sort.⁵⁸

Whether graced with an official title or not, politicians had much need of distinctive reputation. To gain a place in the political domain the assistance of friends and the wealth of family members were necessary adjuncts to repute. But little else could make aspiring gentlemen eligible for public acclaim—no party apparatus worth mentioning, no source of funds from interest groups, apart from the

⁵⁷ One half of the duellists in Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century were lawyers by one estimation. See Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour,” 545n53. I have been unable to locate the origin for this stated estimate of lawyer participation in duels, but Jack Kenny Williams, *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Ante-Bellum South Carolina* (Columbia, 1959), 98-99 offers supporting conclusions.

⁵⁸ Jack Kenny Williams, *Dueling in the Old South* (College Station, TX, 1980), 27; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 355.

often scandal-ridden, speculative land companies, no abundance of government offices to be filled but just a few that thus became the object of desperate rivalries. Unlike the free states, the underpopulated South lacked a sufficiency of towns and ocean ports that required ever expanding federal postal and customs positions.⁵⁹ Under these circumstances of strong political hopes, high competitiveness, and military designations, coupled with an inadequate institutional structure, the chance to display manly reputation and vent career frustrations on the field of honor was very appealing. Dickinson had left his wife that Thursday morning with high hopes and promised to return a victor in the quarrel.

Both Dickinson and Jackson were aware that their followings required their appearance on the field. So long as the public affirmed the idea of a leadership based on an almost sacralized strength of will and heroic self-sacrifice rather than more secular virtues, politicians like them felt obliged to meet all affronts to their dignity and honor. Otherwise they risked losing the support of their clients and advisors and would soon become a neighborhood byword. For General Jackson, the duel was mandatory as well. Gentlemen like Jackson and Dickinson perfunctorily expressed regret over the necessity to reach so drastic a step. Upon learning of the Earl of Clarendon's denunciation of dueling in England, President Jackson in 1837 declared, "The views of the Earle [sic] are those of a Christian, but unless some mode is adopted to frown down by society the slanderer, who is worse than a murderer, all attempts to put down dueling will be in vain."⁶⁰

In addition to defending his own honor, however, Jackson had other commitments no less salient. He had to stand by his friend

⁵⁹ Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (June 1974), 473-87 was the first major challenge to the older historiographical assumptions of early party solidity, professionalism, and organizational discipline. With reference to land speculation and politics, Jackson himself had difficulties, but they were not as incriminating as the manipulations of William Blount, the early Tennessee leader who sponsored Jackson's rise in politics. See *Proceedings on the Impeachment of William Blount, A Senator of the United States from the State of Tennessee, for High Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Philadelphia, 1799); William H. Masterson, *William Blount* (Washington, DC, n.d.), 300-01; Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 86-90, 103-06.

⁶⁰ Quoted in John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South: 1800-1861* (Boston, 1956), 61.

General Coffee who had not fought McNairy just to avenge a slight against himself. Rather, Coffee had hazarded his life because of the ties of both affection and interest that bound him to General Jackson. To borrow from anthropology, a gift exchange, it might be said, was involved, an obligation on Jackson's part to duel, in part, on Coffee's behalf. Jackson and Coffee were sometime business associates and fast friends. In those days male comrades signed each other's promissory notes, complimented successes, lamented misfortunes, toasted undying cordiality, served as seconds on the dueling ground, and sometimes themselves fought on the field of honor as surrogates, if some reason prevented the principal from doing so.

John Overton's close relationship with Jackson as his second, business partner, and most admiring supporter from their earliest days in Nashville was another case in point.⁶¹ Overton showed his fealty even after Jackson's death. He had his servants burn all his intimate correspondence with his patron, friend and lord, as he probably perceived him. Overton was protecting Jackson's good name even after death. In sum, to quote John 25:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁶² Once in giving advice to a young relative about his reading, Jackson recommended "the history of the Scottish chiefs." In particular he singled out Sir William Wallace because "we find in him the truly undaunted courage, always ready to brave any dangers, for the relief of his country or his friend."⁶³ That was also Jackson's personal credo, one that ended on the precise point of loyalty to companions. Those closest to the Nashville controversy were acting as blood brothers, an exclusive and sacred tie to which Jackson himself devoted his very life.

Finally, the duel served as a means to vent repressed feelings and hide material ambitions that could be articulated only in an act of aggression, not words of explanation or self-reflection. The rationale

⁶¹ Agreements with John Overton, May 12, 1794, in Smith *et al.* eds., *Papers of Jackson*, I, 46-47, also other business transactions, 54-60; John H. Eaton to John Overton, Jan. 7, 1826, in *Dear Judge: Selected Letters of John Overton of Traveller's Rest*, ed. Fletcher Coke (Nashville, 1989), 70-72. On supporters and leaders outside the slave states who duelled in behalf of each other, see Freeman, "Duelling as Politics," 307.

⁶² Jackson himself, having been a client at the service of Senator William Blount, would have duelled on Blount's behalf just as Coffee had on Jackson's account.

⁶³ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 8.

for dueling, however, was usually couched in opposite terms—that it made men civilized by that very repression. It is true that those seeking to avoid offense were therefore especially careful to conceal their resentments and consuming jealousies with courtesies and shows of magnanimity. Elegant toasts, bows and flourishes, stately language of address—all were ways to assure listeners that intentions were innocent of malice.⁶⁴ In contrast, the duel supplied ritual words that required no personal invention. In Renaissance Italy such an epithet as “poltroon,” “liar” or “coward” was called the “*mentita*”—giving the lie.⁶⁵ Yet, even as coolness, silence, tight-lipped stoicism in the face of death marked the dueling heroes, their inarticulateness hid deep emotions that could return to haunt the survivor, sometimes with the force that shell-shock victims experience in war.

The duel with Dickinson as well as Jackson's famous political battles—most particularly his war against Nicholas Biddle and his allegedly corrupt, enslaving Bank in Philadelphia—mirrored those precepts. The encounter at the Kentucky tavern demonstrated the patron-client character of early American politics, with its stress on honorable friendships and implacable enmities. That style of action must be seen as a factor in Jackson's most famous disputes, only two of which can be mentioned in so brief a sketch. The first was the general's explosive reaction to his loss of the presidency in 1825. A divided electoral college threw the decision into the hands of the lower federal house. There, candidates John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay, reaching a tacit understanding, allied themselves with the result being Adams's elevation to the highest national post and Clay's swift accession to the status of presidential heir-apparent (within days of his election in the House of Representatives Adams appointed Clay secretary of state, traditional spot for a president's successor). Having outpolled Clay, Adams might be seen as patron and Clay as client with obvious advantages to both. Having won in 1824 the highest number of votes of all candidates in both the election and the electoral college, Jackson was outraged. He and his camp charged duplicity, the thwarting of

⁶⁴ See for example of typical toasts of the day, Smith *et al.* eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 63-64.

⁶⁵ Robert Baldick, *The Duel: A History of Dueling* (London, 1965), 33: dueling is avoidable, he notes, except for the “lie direct.” Reference supplied by Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 149n20.

popular will, and the ruin of sound government. The general fumed, "So you see the *Judas* of the West [Clay] has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver" from the puritanical high priest of Massachusetts. Needless to say, as the rules of the game provided, Adams claimed to have made the appointment on the basis of Clay's "talents and services" to the country. Meantime, Clay accepted the assignment because it made no sense, he argued rather pointlessly, not to serve under the candidate for whom he had voted in the House of Representatives.⁶⁶

John Quincy Adams, no partisan leader, let his opponent set the election issues, including the "Corrupt Bargain" question, but Clay had blundered as well. The gift exchange of one high office and a subordinate one was too overt, too subject to charges of malfeasance, the abuse of public funds and perquisites of power for private gain. The charges of a "Corrupt Bargain" sparked a four-year Jackson campaign against the beleaguered incumbents. Ordinarily reciprocation for services rendered was not meant to be as immediate as Adams's nomination of Clay had been. So clumsy and hasty a return of an obligation could never be interpreted as something freely and generously given. Even among friends, gambling debts were to be paid at once because no personal tie could be permitted to blur the almost sacred distinction between winner and loser. Jackson's insistence that Major Ervin hand over notes as good as gold coin in paying off Ervin's racing debt was very much a case in point. Political debts, in which monetary exchange was forbidden, were to be regarded neither as games of chance with strangers nor as business contracts, signed and sealed. Instead, all patronage transactions were supposed to be voluntary, with merit and affection, not material gain, the basis. Such a fiction (as it sometimes was) was deemed necessary because politicians had to assert their autonomy at all times, albeit with expectation of a preferment, appropriately delayed. Clay should have thanked Adams for the offer but declined with hints that a later appointment or the advancement of a friend to the cabinet post would be welcome. If deftly arranged, no scandal would

⁶⁶ Remini, *Election of Andrew Jackson*, 26-27. The late Edward Pessen wrongly claims that Jackson and his party misrepresented what had happened. They had it right, and everyone understood the matter quite well. Even Clay recognized that he had erred, as Pessen admits. See Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (rev. ed., Urbana, IL, 1985), 163.

most likely have ensued. Instead, an inside deal, grossly mishandled as this matter was, suggested a dependency in the relation between patron and client that a majority of voters were likely to judge shameless and venal. Jackson had every right to protest, storm, and rage, even though as a conventional man of affairs he might himself have acted similarly—though probably more prudently under comparable circumstances.

With regard to a second example, the intricacies of patronage and clientage bear reference to Jackson's outrage over John Calhoun's failure to serve his leader in the manner expected of him. As sociologist Eric Wolf has observed, instrumental or protective friendships like that of Jackson and Calhoun were fragile. In part, these sometime equals in the court of honor had fallen out because of a change in status—with Jackson in the presidential seat and Calhoun, his former chief when secretary of war, becoming second-in-command. These shifts of position eroded mutual trust and stimulated jealousy.⁶⁷ In addition, influenced perhaps by his aristocratic wife Floride, Vice President Calhoun crossed the general during the quarrel over Peggy Eaton's controversial social standing. She was the former mistress but current wife of Secretary of War John H. Eaton.⁶⁸ Sensitive on the point because Rachel Jackson's honor had been stained for comparable reasons, Jackson had embraced Peggy Eaton's cause as his own. In Jackson's opinion, Calhoun and his friends were busily plotting "to put Major Eaton out of the Cabinet, & disgrace me . . . [and] lessen my standing with the people" so that Calhoun could run in his place at the next election.⁶⁹

In 1830, while president, Jackson learned from Calhoun's own publication of correspondence that, as secretary of war in Monroe's cabinet, Calhoun had not unequivocally stood by the general in his difficulties during the Seminole War in Florida. "I had a right to believe you were my sincere friend," Jackson admonished him, and explained that he had no expectation ever to exclaim "*Et tu Brute*. In

⁶⁷ Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations," 12-13, differentiates between emotional and instrumental friendships but both can end in quick ruptures.

⁶⁸ The best examination of the Eaton controversy is Richard B. Latner, "The Eaton Affair" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 36 (1977), 330-51, esp. 340-41; also, Jackson to Coffee, Mar. 22, 1829, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, IV, 15. A severe criticism of Jackson's handling of the affair can be found in Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 288-91.

⁶⁹ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 292.

all your letters as War Secretary you approved *entirely* my conduct in relation to the Seminole campaign. Understanding you now, no further communication with you on this subject is necessary.”⁷⁰ To another correspondent Jackson wrote that Calhoun in cabinet council certainly possessed the right to act by his own lights, “but as long as a single spark of honor animates my own bosom I cannot concede to him the right of acting diametrically opposite to his professions.” It was always all or nothing in Jackson’s relationships. Also, in a pamphlet carefully prepared, Calhoun vindicated himself, as he thought, by disclosures of some of Jackson’s letters. It was his “sacred obligation,” Calhoun announced, to “vindicate my character, impeached as it has been,” and show “myself not unworthy” of public trust.⁷¹ But, the vice president had neither sought nor received the general’s prior permission to reproduce his words. Worse, Calhoun disclosed the feud between himself and his cabinet rival, Martin Van Buren, to a degree that embarrassed the president and the Democratic party. In a truly patriarchal sense, the cabinet officers were, after all, the president’s official family whose business was bared for all the world to notice. The age appreciated reticence about private matters but of course relished the gossip when secrets were unveiled. Meantime, Calhoun could not challenge a sitting president to a duel. Universally the rules of the *code duello* permitted neither monarch, prime minister, nor elected ruler to risk life when entrusted with authority. Calhoun could only plot against his superior. The subordinate could not fire a treasonous shot at him because he would then succeed to the office himself. But apart from that consideration, as the Irish rules for dueling insisted, “equality” of rank was “indispensable” for all parties on the field.⁷² Calhoun’s quickened role in the nullification crisis was perhaps partly a reaction to his powerlessness and utter humiliation in this struggle.

Given his insistence on unqualified loyalty, touched by bonds of genuine friendship, Jackson’s shift of preference from his former run-

⁷⁰ See Jackson to Calhoun, May 30, 1830, Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, IV, 141.

⁷¹ Jackson and Calhoun quoted in Irving H. Bartlett, *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* (New York, 1993), 175.

⁷² See Rule 14, “The Irish Code of Honor,” appended to John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor or, Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling* (Charleston, 1828), 15.

ning-mate to Martin Van Buren was quite understandable. Shrewdly Van Buren, who knew how to play the general's favorite tunes of courtesy and deference, resigned in the midst of the turmoil to smooth the president's path for remaking his cabinet and purging Calhoun's allies in it. As a result, Van Buren became heir to "Old Hickory's" presidency.⁷³ The two incidents, the "Corrupt Bargain" affair and the initial break with Calhoun, illustrate the role that the proprieties and discourse of both patron-client relations and the ethic of honor played in national affairs.

In turning to the second point—the relation of Jackson's personal life to the tenets behind the *code duello*—it is not implied that battle or duel traumatized him. Nevertheless, he had every reason to feel insecure and aware of life's brevity, to understand how quickly the world forgot the dead, and how hellish the length of personal suffering could be. As a creature nurtured in hardship, Jackson felt a powerful urge to survive and to achieve high political, military, and financial aims. Ambition, intense and sometimes overbearing, propelled him forward to his remarkable destiny. Yet a subtext of a survivor's guilt and a repression of what would otherwise have been a debilitating grief marked his career as well. Jackson's father, a Scots-Irish settler in western North Carolina, died in a timber-cutting accident about the time that Jackson was born. Naturally the son idolized the missing parent.

During the American Revolution, brother Hugh, age sixteen, became fatally ill from heat exhaustion after the Battle of Stono Ferry in 1780.⁷⁴ To avenge his death, young Andrew and his older brother Robert joined American forces hastily gathered in their neighborhood. They were captured, and in the course of brave refusal to blacken an officer's boots, both were struck with a sword. Though sorely wounded, Andrew survived the assault, but the blow to Robert's head was more serious.⁷⁵ The boys were released in an exchange of prisoners that their mother's entreaties helped to arrange. She and Andrew, shoeless, bleeding, and feverish, walked the forty miles

⁷³ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 293-314.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁵ John Henry Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson, Major-General in the Service of the United States Comprising A History of the War in the South from the Commencement of the Creek Campaign to the Termination of Hostilities before New Orleans* (Philadelphia, 1824), 13.

home while Robert, barely alive, rode the horse. Elizabeth Jackson nursed her sons' injuries and mounting attacks of smallpox and malaria, but Robert soon died. Then their mother herself abruptly fell fatally ill from disease while treating some cousins in distant Charleston even as her only living son still lay delirious at home in the Waxhaws District. Four deaths to be mourned when the orphan Andrew Jackson was himself only fifteen! As Robert Remini has succinctly put it, "The scars remained with him through life."⁷⁶

The memories of his mother that Jackson most often repeated were her words of warning about survival in a harsh, unfeeling world: "If ever you have to vindicate your feelings or defend your honor, do it calmly." In another phrasing of the sentiment, Jackson recalled her commanding him never to sue at law for "insult or battery or defamation. The law affords no remedy for such outrage that can satisfy a gentleman. Fight." These were lessons that she had learned from the Scots of Northern Ireland, having herself descended from Robert the Bruce. The Scots-Irish were more prone to personal violence and more conscious of honor than any group then settled in the country.⁷⁷

The miracle was that Jackson did not suffer more emotional damage than he did. According to psychologists there is a pattern of reaction that separates the "invulnerable child" from other victims of early disruption and loss. Such an individual "develops," declares one analyst, "a kind of self-immunizing capacity against harsh and threatening environments." Often children of this character learn early to conceptualize perils as possibly arising from a variety of sources, and they hone skills by which to survive, a precociousness that goes beyond courage and boldness to something more creative than the ordinary individual can muster. From a psychological perspective that kind of resource is much harder to explain than a succumbing to narcissistic or alienating defensiveness. Nevertheless, there is usually some price to pay—a touchiness, an intolerance of

⁷⁶ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 25; Frances Tomlinson Gardner, "The Gentleman from Tennessee," *Surgery, Gynecology, and Obstetrics*, 88 (Mar. 1949), 404.

⁷⁷ James C. Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication* (Boston, 1976), 12; John Trotwood Moore, quoted in "Andrew Jackson's Duel in a New Light: Lately Found Documents Reveal Details of Dramatic Episode in the President's Life," *New York Times*, Mar. 15, 1925, clipping, Andrew Jackson MSS (Tennessee State Archives, Nashville).

disagreement or criticism, and other signs of hostility or affront, intended or not.⁷⁸ Moreover, the desperate road to a sense of self-possession may still require trials and errors of conduct and end up with a rigid and punctilious obedience to the by-laws and conventions of the orphan's culture.

In Jackson's case, a fatherless childhood was evident in his wildness of behavior. But after losing his mother and brothers, the youth became even more uncontrollable as if these losses had in a sense "detrified" him. Defensive, often angry, given to cruel pranks, and aimless of purpose, he was clearly troubled.⁷⁹ At the same time his health was highly problematic. Because of a neurological disorder, in his youth he had the unfortunate habit of drooling uncontrollably—an infantilizing condition that compelled him to fight anyone who made fun of him. A dermatological problem called the "Big Itch" covered his body in those early years of his life, and malarial fevers often returned. He had an almost laughable beanpole of a frame for which he compensated by habits of "frenetic bellicosity."⁸⁰ When a kinsman left him nearly 400 pounds sterling in 1783, young Jackson spent the fortune on pleasures with abandon, a reaction that biographer James Curtis identifies as "a kind of mourning." Unable to find his mother's grave in a Charleston cemetery, he hid his sense of anguish beneath laughter, drink, gambling, and wenching. How could he not conclude that his mother had abandoned him when he was so ill and then left this earth before he could even say goodbye? "When tidings of her death reached me I at first could not believe it, when I finally realized it I felt utterly alone," Jackson later recalled in a rare moment of self-revelation.⁸¹ Yet, fervently he romanticized Elizabeth Jackson's patriotism and high-minded honor. No wonder Jackson learned to conform himself to the moral world of honor in which he lived. Structure of some kind was necessary. Obeying all the rules of the code, including the duel, not only channeled his emotions

⁷⁸ E. James Anthony, "Psychoanalysis and Environment," in George H. Pollock and Stanley I. Greenspan, eds., *The Course of Life: Vol. VI, Late Adulthood* (Madison, CT, 1993), 261-310, quotation at 304. I owe this citation to Anne Wyatt-Brown, who called my attention to its relevance.

⁷⁹ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 10-12.

⁸⁰ Gardner, "Gentleman from Tennessee," 404.

⁸¹ Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication*, 11-12. I am much indebted to Curtis's sensitive biography.

in conventional, conservative rituals but also offered him the chance to win the kind of public acclaim that confirmed his ambitions and completed his sense of identity.⁸²

Yet, the nagging sense of grief and injury unresolved was not entirely stilled. A further source of insecurity and anger, banked though it was, grew out of his marriage to Rachel Donelson, daughter of his politically powerful and widowed landlady outside Nashville. Jackson's love for the winsome and attractive Rachel was deep and abiding. In truth she became his anchor, not for herself alone, but also for his earnest need of feminine companionship and succor in the absence of a mother and sisters. For instance, in 1796 he wrote her, "I mean to retire from the Buss of publick life, and Spend My Time with you alone in Sweet Retirement, which is My only ambition and ultimate wish."⁸³ The sentiment was sincerely felt at that moment but not at all what he had in mind for his future.

The story of their courtship and marriage can only be summarized briefly here. Rachel Donelson's marriage to Jackson took place before she was properly divorced from the despicable Lewis Robards. Much in love, Rachel Donelson and Jackson, although a practicing attorney who must have known better, conveniently presumed that she was free of the prior encumbrance. The result was embarrassing gossip that included both adultery and divorce—the two greatest blemishes on a lady's honor that could then be imagined. They were wise to clear up the legal muddle by a second ceremony in Nashville in 1794.⁸⁴ If Jackson had not already attached himself to the wellborn and well-connected territorial Governor William Blount, he might not

⁸² An example of Jackson's conformity to the rules of honor was evident in his handling of the duel between two very young men, Thomas J. Overton, a friend, and John Dickinson in 1805. Jackson insisted that his principal had the right to choose the distance—seven feet from the point of back-to-back positions—but Dickinson refused to fight at less than twenty-four feet. Jackson argued, "If [Dickinson] did not come forward on these terms [of fourteen feet] he would be exposed to the world and that Mr. T[homas] O[verton] would Kain him for the expression used in the note aforesaid." Such were the rules, even governing boys. The duel took place; Dickinson, in a second volley of firing, shot his adversary from a distance of 6 inches, Overton having missed a second time. Overton survived the wound. Jackson, deposition on the duel, July 1805, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 117-19.

⁸³ Jackson to Rachel Jackson, May 9, 1796, in Smith *et al.* eds., *Papers of Jackson*, I, 91.

⁸⁴ "Marriage License," Jan. 18, 1794, *ibid.* 44.

have survived the uproar, but under Blount's patronage he gained reappointment as attorney general and then as judge advocate of the local county militia.⁸⁵ Young Rachel, however, had to suffer from the sneers and contempt of Jackson's enemies. In 1803, following a successful campaign for governor, John Sevier charged that Jackson, once his fierce rival for the post of major-general of the militia, "had run off with another man's wife."⁸⁶ After an undignified scuffle of sorts, Jackson and Sevier arranged to duel over the insult. In the ensuing encounter, Sevier ended up hiding behind a tree while Jackson ineffectually waved his sword about. No one got hurt.⁸⁷

Over the subsequent years, affairs of honor, engagements in war, and other dramatic events did not dispel the insecurities in the Jackson household. For one thing, Jackson's health was so bad and the physical pain he endured so excruciating that, as Robert Remini notes, it was a miracle that he lived as long as he did.⁸⁸ Three bullets, one from Dickinson's pistol and the other two from Thomas Hart Benton's in another *rencontre*, had entered his chest, shoulder and arm.⁸⁹ They caused all sorts of complications, particularly the ball in his left lung. He also suffered from rheumatism in the right arm,

⁸⁵ Appointment as Mero District Attorney for the Southwest Territory, Feb. 15, 1791, *ibid.*, 26; Commission as Judge Advocate, Sept. 10, 1792, *ibid.*, 37-38; William Blount to James Robertson, Jan. 2, 1792 in "The Correspondence of Gen. James Robertson," *American Historical Magazine*, 1 (July 1896), 280; Masterson, *William Blount*, 292; Gen. Marcus J. Wright, *Some Account of the Life and Services of William Blount* (Washington, DC, n.d.), 9.

⁸⁶ Curtis, *Jackson*, 40. Sevier and Jackson skirted a duel earlier in 1797. John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, May 8, 1797, in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, I, 31. Like other men of honor: Sevier readily declared, "My reputation Mr. Jackson is to me my only treasure" (p. 32). But after word play by further correspondence, Sevier offered the olive branch using the language appropriate to the occasion: "A man of merit will always find me his friend, and I am a foe only to such who in private and public life continue to act dishonorable and disgraceful. The objects of us both seem to be an honorable reconciliation. When men act coolly and dispassionately this may be easily effected; and if language of sincerity be used, that reconciliation may be durable." Sevier to Jackson, May 11, 1797, *ibid.*, 36. But on the 1803 episode, see Jackson to Sevier, Oct. 2, 3, 9, 1803, *ibid.*, 71-76. See also, Sevier to Jackson, Oct. 10, 1803 and Jackson to Sevier, Oct. 11 1803, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, I, 380-81, 384-85.

⁸⁷ Curtis, *Jackson*, 40.

⁸⁸ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 224-25, 364-65.

⁸⁹ On his duel with Benton, see Jackson to Benton, Aug. 4, 1813, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jackson*, II, 418-22.

periodic hemorrhaging, amyloidosis, an inflammatory ailment, dysentery and other stomach troubles for which he took great quantities of mercury and sugar of lead—then mistakenly thought to be efficacious. He fought the Creek War in 1812 when barely able to ride a horse. He had to hang himself between two poles because he could neither sit up nor lie down. In his declining years the former president's health was so poor that his will to survive, about which all his biographers marvel, resists credibility. If heroism were defined by a defiance of pain alone, Jackson was by far the most heroic of all the American presidents.⁹⁰

But the Jackson family had problems of the mind as well. Jackson was subject to periodic bouts of depression. As Remini puts it with special reference to the public uproar following his invasion of Spanish Florida mentioned earlier, the general experienced in 1819 "extreme fluctuations of mood . . . from rage over the censure of 'conspiracy' to delirious exultation occasioned by the frenzied receptions of the American people repeatedly accorded him."⁹¹ Abysmal health contributed to such swings, but deeper emotional troubles that had their origins earlier in his life contributed to his volatility.

Rachel Jackson was also not spared from a gloomy outlook. Early in the marriage Rachel became convinced that the disapproving gaze of the Almighty had fallen upon her. Barren at a time when childlessness was regarded as an unnatural offense, she became ever more religious, convinced that it was God's punishment for her sexual sins, a curse that Jackson, rather indifferent to religion, vainly tried to dispel. They adopted a child, Andrew Jackson, Jr., in 1810. Even before that, the Jackson household was filled with baby nieces and nephews and neighborhood toddlers to cover the couple's frustration for having no offspring of their own. And death conspired against the pair as well. Having rescued after a battle a Creek child named Lyncoya, Jackson sent the orphan to Rachel in Nashville. Recalling his own baptism of horror in the Revolution, the general declared, "when I reflect that he as to his relations is so much like myself I feel an unusual sympathy for him." Although treated as a full member of the

⁹⁰ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 2-3; Gardner, "Gentleman from Tennessee," 404-11.

⁹¹ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 378-79.

house, Lyncoya ran away more than once to rejoin the Creeks. Then, in his seventeenth year, he died of tuberculosis.⁹²

Jackson's loss of his wife just before his inauguration exacerbated his underlying sense of life's impermanence. After the victory in the 1828 campaign, Rachel had discovered in a pamphlet the slanders circulating about adultery and bigamy, and she became hysterical. Robert Remini suggests that she gave up on life, and so it would seem. In any event shortly thereafter she suffered a severe heart attack and died at the Hermitage on December 22. Her death, so sudden and unpredictable, reinforced the dread of abandonment that had overwhelmed him with the death of parents and all his siblings so many years before. Oftentimes, a second time of great loss re-ignites the grief that the first instance caused.

As if suddenly he was reentering the hell of those earlier deaths in the Revolution, Jackson was inconsolable, refusing to eat or drink for days. Over her grave in the Hermitage garden he placed a memorial tablet which included the words: "A being so gentle and so virtuous, slander might wound but could not dishonor."⁹³ Menachim Begin, the Israeli leader, was so despondent at his wife's death that he turned his face to the wall and died. Old Hickory might have done the same. He had been very dependent upon her almost as if she was not merely his wife but a mother. But with a presidential term yet to fulfill, Jackson stifled his despair, so long held in check, and summoned the old resource, a propulsive dread of extinction, to master any doubts and insecurities. To serve as a national leader, chosen by the people, was one way to give the lie to the calumnies that she had endured.

Apart from the childless Rachel and her relations, Jackson had no immediate family. In the rural, clan-bound culture in which he was immersed that loss was considered a special burden. Under these circumstances it was no wonder that General Jackson's reliance on friends and also allies had an unusual intensity. For instance, early in the Seminole War in 1818, Captain Obed Wright of the Georgia mili-

⁹² Marquis James, *Andrew Jackson, The Border Captain* (Indianapolis, 1933), 139; Jackson to Rachel Jackson, Dec. 29, 1813, quoted in Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 194.

⁹³ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 152-55 (quotation at 55).

tia obliterated a village of Chehaw Indians. Jackson was outraged and declared to Georgia Governor William Rabun that Wright and his men were guilty of an “inhuman attack, on the old woman [sic] and men of the Chehaw village, whilst the warriors of that village was with me fighting the battles of our *country* against the common enemy. . . . This act,” he thundered, “will to the last age fix a Stain upon the character of Georgia.”⁹⁴ Fidelity to friends and allies—whether light or dark-skinned—was central to Jackson’s notion of honor.

The fight with Dickinson in 1806 to a substantial degree underlined the importance of fidelity in Jackson’s thinking and conduct but also illuminated how he translated a sense of doom and meaninglessness into an empowering anger and determination to outlive opponents. He need not have killed his helpless adversary on the Logan County meadow. When assailed for the deed, he argued that had he known that he would himself survive, he would have dropped his weapon unfired. I doubt it. The man could hate with a passion. So far as Jackson was concerned, Dickinson, arrogant and contemptuous, got exactly what he deserved, particularly for his assault on Rachel’s character.

Jackson drove away his own dread of anonymity and emptiness by embracing both love of friends and undying vengeance against enemies. Even as president he could act under the same impulses that directed his conduct in the confrontation with Dickinson. In 1833, for instance, Robert Beverly Randolph, a naval purser charged with rendering a false financial account, lost his commission on Jackson’s orders. The president believed that the young man was “*an unfit associate for those sons of chivalry, integrity, and honor, who adorn our Navy.*” At a reception in Alexandria, Virginia, the disgraced officer approached Jackson and tried to pull his nose, an act to violate the honor of the president in the most insolent way then conceivable. Jackson immediately seized a cane and was preparing to thrash “the villain,” as he shouted. Although “an old man,” he declared himself quite capable of “punishing a dozen cowardly assassins.” Those present restrained him, and Randolph fled. Years later, when Martin

⁹⁴ Andrew Jackson to William Rabun, May 7, 1818, in Smith *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Jackson*, IV, 202.

Van Buren was president, the offender was arrested for the assault. Jackson requested his successor in the White House to pardon the former naval officer because, Jackson insisted, his mother had warned him never "to indict" anyone for "assault and battery or sue him for slander." Only physical reprisal was the proper response to insult.⁹⁵ As always, Jackson was true to the rubrics of masculine honor.

For a final reflection on Jackson's concept of honor, a return to the notion of the Hero of New Orleans as a metaphor for the mentality of the slave South is appropriate. Such an exercise demonstrates that on a personal level of honorable conduct the duel in 1806 that occupied much attention here was a small-scale representation of a larger issue. It bore relationship to a more significant matter. Just as personal insults could lead to duels so could northern assaults on southern reputation for honesty and Christian bearing result in civil conflict. John Brown's Raid and Lincoln's election seemed a culmination of northern contempt, hostility, and determination to destroy southern wealth and power, all of which Republicans considered dependent upon that corrupting national canker, slavery. Despite longstanding warnings of disunion, the Lower South secessionists were convinced that the North had had the effrontery to give the South "the lie direct," to use the dueling term. Translating personal fury into corporate resentment was not an illogical or novel step by the standards of the southern ethic. Soon enough at the Battle of Franklin, not far from Jackson's Hermitage and other fields of honor, thousands of Americans, white and black, would die to uphold or eliminate the southerners' interpretation of that ancient constitution for male conduct. Even the southern women fully appreciated the manly cult. They warned their men, as Elizabeth Jackson had counseled her son, never to lose their sense of honor, die fighting, disdain retreat, and, as Peter Gay has put it, emulate "the fabled Spartan mother who enjoined her sons never to be caught with wounds on their backs."⁹⁶

To revert to Jackson's career, whether fighting Biddle's bank or outmaneuvering the nullifiers under Calhoun's leadership, the presi-

⁹⁵ This account is gratefully taken from Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 20-22.

⁹⁶ Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience Victoria to Freud* (3 vols., New York, 1993), III, 113.

dent used the principles of honor, as he defined them, as his guide. That set of rules governed all relations, but especially political friendships, in Jackson's estimation, and in its rubrics he found his identity and his inspiration. By the guidelines of honor he appealed to a public that could affirm his integrity and status. In his political contests, Jackson sought the approval of the populace not because of a modern and liberal concept of democracy in which all conditions of people were equal but because he reckoned the popular will to be an instrument of self-vindication. For him *vox populi* was a fitting receptacle not merely for his own honor. Rather, in the egalitarian spirit he saw the opportunity for others, too, to display and command a right to honor—to achieve what I have called elsewhere a “people’s timocracy.”⁹⁷ By that term is meant a society in which the criteria of honor and the debasement of shame were the polarities for assessing everyone, especially community leaders. Membership was open to all who shared Jackson's convictions and belonged in that nationwide but still restricted fraternity of white, adult males. They need only swear unswerving allegiance to the American slaveholding Union. How ironic that the founder of the world's first and oldest continuing party should have been so primitive, so biased and narrow, even merciless at times, and yet no less complicated and engaging than a protagonist in a Spanish tragedy from the Golden Age of drama.

⁹⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 187.

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